THE
Dan Smoot Report

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DAN SMOOT

BIPARTISAN BETRAYAL

On February 7, 1965, President Johnson ordered limited bombing of selected targets in North Vietnam. On May 13, 1965, he ordered a total halt of the bombing for 5 days. On December 24, 1965, he ordered a total halt of bombing in North Vietnam for 37 days (until January 31, 1966). From the end of January, 1966, to the end of March, 1968, Johnson ordered seven more partial or total halts to American bombing of North Vietnam.

All these bombing halts were intended, ostensibly, to test the good faith of the communists — to determine whether they would reciprocate and join us in discussions to end the war by negotiations. Each bombing halt was preceded and followed by statements from President Johnson, admitting that a bombing halt would endanger the lives of our men unless the communists gave some sign that they would respond by decreasing their military activity and by moving to join us in peace talks.

The communists took advantage of each bombing pause to repair bombing damage, to resupply and reinforce their troops, and to launch new offensives. American and South Vietnamese casualty rates increased sharply as a result of each bombing pause.

On March 31, 1968, the President again, for the tenth time, tested the good faith of the communists in Vietnam. He halted, permanently, all bombing in North Vietnam above the 19th parallel, thus placing off limits to American bombers 78% of the territory of North Vietnam (containing most of the industry and 90% of the population of the country). The President virtually begged the communists to join him in peace talks.

After much haggling and hurling of insults, the communists agreed to meet with U.S. representatives at Paris — not to talk peace, really, but to accept American surrender. But the meetings at Paris were called "peace talks"; and they began on May 10, 1968. That day, "all hell broke loose" in Vietnam, as one American officer put it.[1]

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Communists began daily rocket attacks on South Vietnamese cities, killing and wounding hundreds of civilians. American battle casualties more than doubled anything we had suffered before. American battle deaths were averaging 184 a week before the Paris talks. Immediately after the talks began, our battle deaths were 562 a week.[2]

When ordering the permanent bombing halt on March 31, President Johnson said he was withdrawing from politics, to keep the war out of partisan conflicts during 1968; but politically-informed persons knew he would make some last-minute move in an effort to help elect the Democrats' presidential candidate.

The move was made on October 31, five days before the presidential election: Johnson spoke to the nation on television, announcing further limitation of bombing. The March 31 order had permitted bombing in North Vietnam between the 17th parallel (boundary between North and South Vietnam) and the 19th parallel. The October 31 order stopped bombing between the 17th and 19th parallels, except for a very limited area just above the demilitarized zone (a 6-mile-wide strip along the 17th parallel).

The President repeated an earlier promise that "bombing will not stop until we are confident it will not lead to an increase in American casualties." Yet, in the first week of November, after bombing and shelling of North Vietnam had been halted, 166 American fighting men were killed — the biggest weekly casualty toll in more than a month.[3]

In the October 31 television speech, Johnson said:

"A regular session of the Paris talks is going to take place on next Wednesday, November 6, at which the representatives of the Government of South Vietnam are free to participate . . . .

"We could not retract our insistence on the participation of the Government of South Vietnam in serious talks affecting the future of their people . . . .

"The very principle for which we are engaged in South Vietnam—the principle of self-determination—requires that the South Vietnamese people themselves be permitted to freely speak for themselves at the Paris talks, and that the South Vietnamese delegation play a leading role in accordance with our agreement with President Thieu at Honolulu."

When he made that statement on the eve of the American election (cleverly giving the impression that South Vietnam would join the U.S. in peace talks at Paris the day after the elections, but just as cleverly refraining from saying so specifically), Johnson knew the South Vietnamese would not attend the peace talks.[4] He concealed the rift with South Vietnam until November 5 (election day), revealing it then only to explain why the promised Paris talks would not begin the next day.[5]

President Johnson halted the bombing of North Vietnam unilaterally and unconditionally, receiving no commitments or promises from the communists. He did, however, lay down certain conditions which he hoped the communists would meet. In his October 31 broadcast, he said:

"We have reached the stage where productive talks can begin. We have made clear to the other side that such talks cannot continue if they take military advantage of them. We cannot have productive talks in an atmosphere where the cities are being shelled and where the Demilitarized Zone is being abused . . . ."

Prior to the October 31, 1968, bombing halt, the U.S. command in Vietnam said there "was not one scrap of hard evidence" that communists had decided to scale down their military operations in order to promote negotiations.[6]

On November 3 and 4, communists shelled the Mekong Delta city of My Tho. The President of South Vietnam pointed out that these acts violated conditions laid down by President Johnson. The U.S. government issued no statement.[7]

On November 5, South Vietnamese officials said a captured communist document contained orders from Hanoi for increased military and political activity all over South Vietnam after the United States stopped the bombing of North Vietnam.[8]

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On November 6, Viet Cong saboteurs blew out the three center spans of the biggest permanent bridge built by U.S. Army Engineers in Vietnam —across the Saigon River about 18 miles north of the capital.[9]

On November 13, North Vietnamese, charging behind a hail of mortar fire, attacked a U.S. division about 70 miles northwest of Saigon, near the Cambodian border. It was the first communist attack in regimental strength made in South Vietnam in almost two months. U.S. forces beat off the attack in a fight that lasted all night. No report on American casualties was given.[10]

On November 13, U.S. State Department press officer Carl Bartch released a statement which said that, beginning November 9, there had been instances of American or South Vietnamese forces near the demilitarized zone being hit by artillery shelling from communist forces inside the DMZ. Claiming that the U.S. takes a "serious view" of such incidents, the State Department release said:

"Our representatives in Paris have brought this situation forcefully to the attention of the North Vietnamese . . . .

"Our position is that serious talks could not be conducted if the DMZ were abused."[11]

Other State Department officials said, however, that the incidents complained of seemed to be of limited importance, involving perhaps only one communist artillery unit. They said the Bartch statement was made with the hope that North Vietnam would quickly end the violations.[11]

On November 16, 1968, communists attacked U. S. bases with artillery and rockets in the Mekong Delta and near Da Nang (second largest city in South Vietnam). Communist guerrillas bombed a group of civilians in Da Nang. Communist artillery units, and terrorists using grenades, attacked wounded American troops and Vietnamese civilians in the northern part of South Vietnam and in a village near Saigon.[12]

On November 17, U.S. Marines moved against these points of communist activity; and U.S. warplanes retaliated against communists using the demilitarized zone (for the 19th time) in defiance of the condition specified in President Johnson's October 31 bombing-halt order. The planes destroyed nine North Vietnamese military fortifications (bunkers) half a mile inside the southern boundary of the DMZ. U.S. Marines discovered a cache of communist weapons just south of the DMZ. The Marines found 15 big (140 mm) rockets on launchers near Da Nang, aimed at the city. Five other rockets were buried nearby.[12]

Within two weeks after Johnson's October 31 bombing-halt order, communists had repaired bombed-out bridges and roads south of the 19th parallel; and communist troop and supply movements in the southern part of North Vietnam had quadrupled. Troops, food, fuel, guns, and ammunition were being moved down from the north to staging areas within a few miles of the northern side of the demilitarized zone, and to sanctuaries in Laos. U.S. officials in Washington indicated, however, that they would not consider this build-up of staging areas near the DMZ a violation of President Johnson's conditions for stopping the bombing — unless the build-up is accompanied by heavy troop movements across the zone.[13]

In his October 31 television speech, President Johnson said:

"The American people bitterly remember the long, agonizing Korean negotiations of 1951 through 1953 . . . . Our people will just not accept deliberate delay and prolonged procrastination again."

During two years of truce negotiations in Korea (1951-53), 12,700 Americans were killed; 49,500 were wounded. During the first six months of the Paris peace talks of 1968 (from May 10 to November 9), 6400 Americans were killed on battlefields in Vietnam; 22,161 were wounded badly enough to require hospitalization; more than 21,000 suffered lesser wounds that did not require hospitalization.[14]

During the three-year Korean war, 33,629 Americans were killed in action. Between January 1, 1961, and November 9, 1968, 29,350 Americans were killed in action in Vietnam.[14]

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Communists have never yielded a major point in their negotiations with us, and never will unless we have them totally defeated militarily and begging for terms.

Johnson's policy is to continue offering the Ho Chi Minh government a billion-dollar bribe to stop the war in Vietnam. Eventually, Ho will accept, after we have forced the South Vietnamese to form a coalition government with the Viet Cong. Then, we will withdraw our troops and start a multi-billion-dollar aid program for the rehabilitation of both North and South Vietnam.

While our money is building roads, industries, bridges, power plants throughout Vietnam, the Viet Cong will complete the overthrow of the legitimate government of South Vietnam; and the entire country will be unified under one communist dictatorship.

Then, the communists will be ready to take Thailand. We will be faced with the choice of letting them use the material resources we have given them for the conquest of the remainder of Southeast Asia — or of engaging them in another disastrous, no-win, land war in Asia.

Approximately 60% of the American people voted for a change from the Johnson policy in Vietnam; but they will not get it, because they elected Richard Nixon. During the campaign, Nixon promised a change; but before all the ballots were counted, he had a unity meeting with Johnson and proclaimed that Johnson's policy in Vietnam is Nixon's policy. Whatever commitments Johnson makes, Nixon will keep.

What a shameful betrayal!

There is only one way for us to get out of Vietnam safely, without setting the stage for future, deadlier military involvements in Asia: we should hit the communists with every ounce of our strength, pursue them into all their sanctuaries, bomb all strategic targets in North Vietnam, and blockade all seaports.

The communists would quickly sue for peace. As soon thereafter as possible, we should get out — leaving the legitimate government of South Vietnam, and the people of both Vietnams, to handle their own complex postwar problems.

HOPE OF THE WORLD

My regular Christmas *Report*, "The Hope of the World," dated December 23, 1968, is already off the press, available for those who want quantities to use as Christmas greetings. If you have never seen this issue, and would like to read it to determine whether you want to use it as a Christmas greeting, you may order a single copy. Our regular reprint prices apply — 25c for a single copy, quantity prices as shown below.

FOOTNOTES

(1) *U.S. News & World Report*, June 24, 1968, p. 30
(2) *The Dallas Times Herald*, June 14, 1968, p. A4
(3) *The Dallas Morning News*, Nov. 15, 1968, p. 1
(4) *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 6, 1968, p. 1
(5) *The Dallas Morning News*, Nov. 6, 1968, p. A2; *The Dallas Times Herald*, Nov. 6, 1968, p. A7
(6) *The Dallas Morning News*, Nov. 4, 1968, p. A14
(7) *The Dallas Morning News*, Nov. 6, 1968, p. A2
(8) *The Dallas Times Herald*, Nov. 5, 1968, p. A9
(9) AP dispatch from Saigon, Nov. 6, 1968
(10) *The Dallas Morning News*, Nov. 14, 1968, p. 1
(11) *The Dallas Times Herald*, Nov. 14, 1968, p. 1
(12) UPI dispatch from Saigon, Nov. 18, 1968
(13) *The Dallas Morning News*, Nov. 16, 1968, p. 1
(14) *The Dallas Morning News*, Nov. 15, 1968, p. 1

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